



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 356,669

Area (sq. km.): 923,768

Nigeria is about half the size of Mexico, or about the same size as the U.S. states of California, Nevada, and Utah combined. Its geography is as diverse as its people and culture. About one-third of the land is suitable for cultivation. Parts of the country are covered by forests or woodlands. Desert areas are found in the far north. The country also features the grassy plains of the Jos Plateau in the north-central region, sandy beaches and mangrove swamps along the coast, and tropical rain forests and parklands in the central region.

Nigeria is divided into three areas by the Niger and Benue rivers, which meet and flow together to the Gulf of Guinea. These three regions (north, southwest, and southeast) correspond roughly to the boundaries of the three largest ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo). The Delta Region, where the three rivers flow into the Atlantic, is the source of most of Nigeria's oil. The rainy season runs from April to October. The country's climate in the north is dry. In the south, the climate is hot and humid year-round.

History

Early Empires

Nigeria, with its many ethnic groups, has a rich and diverse history. The area has been inhabited since at least 800 BC,

when the Nok people arrived in the Jos Plateau. Various empires arose and flourished in different regions. The Hausa, who live in the north, converted to Islam in the 13th century and established a feudal system that was solidified over time. The Fulani built a great empire in the 1800s. In the southwest, the Yoruba established the Kingdom of Oyo and extended their influence as far as modern Togo. The Ibo, located in the southeast, remained relatively isolated.

European Contact and Colonization

At the end of the 15th century, European explorers and traders made contact with the Yoruba and Benin peoples and began a lucrative slave trade. The British joined the trade in the 1600s but abolished it in 1807. Although no European power had as yet colonized the area, British influence increased until 1861, when Britain declared the area around Lagos a crown colony. By 1914, the entire area had become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

Independence and Civil War

When Nigeria became independent in 1960, tensions began to rise among the various ethnic groups. After two coups and much unrest, the Ibo-dominated eastern region attempted to secede and establish the Republic of Biafra. Two and a half years of civil war (1967–70) followed, and the Ibo were forced back into the republic after more than one million people died.

Political Instability

In 1979, elections established a representative civilian government, but it lasted only until late 1983, when a military coup gave General Mohammed Buhari control. In 1985, Major General Ibrahim Babangida overthrew Buhari. He later promised civilian rule by 1992, and national elections were

held in June 1993. However, once it was apparent that Chief Moshood Abiola (a Yoruba) would win, Babangida refused to accept the results. He annulled the election and rioting broke out in many cities. After a power struggle, Babangida resigned. His rival, General Sani Abacha, seized power from the interim government. Chief Abiola was imprisoned and charged with treason after he declared himself president of the country.

Abacha dissolved democratic institutions and declared himself ruler of Nigeria. Human-rights abuses and corruption became Abacha's hallmarks. Strikes, unrest, and international pressure failed to force him from power. Abacha promised a return to democracy by the end of 1998 but allowed only five loyal parties to register in legislative elections. He then ordered all five parties to nominate him as their presidential candidate.

Steps Toward Democracy

When Abacha died of a heart attack in June 1998, his chief of defense staff, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, took over the presidency. Abubakar pledged to turn power over to a civilian government. He released political prisoners and fired Abacha loyalists. Unlike past military rulers, Abubakar followed through on his pledge to hold free and fair elections. Local polls were held in December 1998. Legislative and presidential elections followed in February 1999. Olusegun Obasanjo, a military leader in the 1970s, was elected president, and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) won a majority of parliamentary seats.

The atmosphere of greater democracy unleashed simmering grievances between various regions, ethnic groups, and religions. Thousands have been killed in fighting between Christians and Muslims, between Yoruba and Hausa, and between ethnic groups in the Delta Region. Northern, Muslim-dominated states have enacted policies to implement *shari'ah* (Islamic law) in order to enforce Islamic morality and other values, angering these states' Christian minority. Activists in the Delta Region often attack oil refineries and workers to demand a greater portion of oil revenue.

Obasanjo was reelected in 2003 and, having reached his two-term limit, chose Umaru Musa Yar'adua as his successor to lead the PDP. Yar'adua won the election, which was marred by political violence and allegations of vote-rigging. In 2010, President Yar'adua died after a long illness. Vice president Goodluck Jonathan took over the presidency, declaring plans to institute governmental and energy reforms, work toward peace in the Delta Region, and eliminate corruption. Jonathan was elected in 2011. The election deepened political divisions between north and south. In northern Nigeria, hundreds were killed in rioting that broke out after it was announced that Jonathan, a Christian southerner, had won the presidency.

Since Jonathan's election, religious violence between Muslim and Christian groups has increased. Thousands of people reportedly have been killed in bombings or other attacks attributed to the militant Islamist group Boko Haram. Nigeria continues to struggle with religious and ethnic violence, corruption, low levels of human development, and poor infrastructure.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Missing oil revenue:** In February 2014, Lamido Sanusi, the central bank governor of Nigeria, was suspended by President Jonathan for "financial recklessness and misconduct" after reporting that US\$20 billion in oil revenue was unaccounted for due to corruption. Sanusi refused to resign since only the National Assembly has the power to remove the central bank governor. Reformers in Nigeria who point fingers at corruption are often silenced by being accused of wrongdoing themselves.

- **Conflict escalation:** In April 2014, Amnesty International reported that 1,500 people—half of them civilians—have been killed in Boko Haram-related violence since the beginning of the year. The report also described the response of the Nigerian security forces as brutal. The Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in May 2013 and sent thousands of troops to fight the rebels; however, rebel attacks have only intensified.

- **Schoolgirl abduction:** In April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped more than two hundred schoolgirls from Borno state, in the northeastern part of the country. The group has threatened to sell the girls, who have been missing for several weeks. Boko Haram, which means "Western education is sinful," often targets students.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Population: 174,507,539

Population Growth Rate: 2.54%

Urban Population: 50%

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. About half of the population lives in urban areas. With 10.2 million people, Lagos is the nation's largest urban area and the second largest on the continent (after Cairo, Egypt).

Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups, each with a distinct cultural heritage. In the north, the Hausa and Fulani combined make up 29 percent of the population. Although ethnically distinct, the two groups have become largely intertwined as a result of proximity, history, and shared religion. Other large groups include the Yoruba (21 percent) in the southwest and the Ibo (18 percent) in the southeast. Smaller groups such as the Ogoni, Ijaw, and Kanuri comprise the remaining 32 percent.

Language

More than 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria. English is the official language and the language of most media, including television and newspapers. However, less than half of the population can actually speak English, and many consider it a foreign language. Pidgin English (a combination of basic English and local languages) aids communication between people of different ethnic groups; it is often used in casual conversation. Each ethnic group has its own distinct language. Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, and Efik are widely spoken. People often speak both their own ethnic language and the language of the area's largest ethnic group. Educated Nigerians are often

fluent in several languages, usually speaking English and one or more regional languages. Many in the older generation lament that young people sometimes do not speak the language of their ethnic group, preferring to speak English and the language of a larger ethnic group instead.

About 69 percent of Nigerians are literate, but the rate is not equally distributed. The literacy rate is higher in the south than in the north, and lower among women (particularly Muslim women) than men.

Religion

Nigeria is divided primarily between Muslims and Christians. The north is mostly Muslim and features several mosques, while the southeast is primarily Christian. About half the residents of the southwest are Muslim; half are Christian. In all, about 50 percent of Nigerians are Muslim and 40 percent are Christian. Nigerians who follow traditional African belief systems exclusively (10 percent) are spread throughout the country. Many Christians and Muslims also incorporate indigenous African worship practices and beliefs into their daily lives. This includes such practices as ancestor veneration and worshipping natural objects.

Central to Islam is a belief in the *Qur'an* as the word of *Allah* revealed to the prophet Muhammad. They show devotion through the Five Pillars of Islam: professing that there is no God but *Allah* and Muhammad is his prophet; praying five times daily while facing Mecca, Saudi Arabia; giving money to the poor; fasting from dawn to dusk during the holy month of *Ramadan*; and making a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime, if possible.

As part of a constitution adopted in 1999, the predominantly Muslim northern states have the option of establishing *shari'ah* (Islamic law) courts to handle certain cases. The states have interpreted that to mean *shari'ah* can be the governing force in most local matters, a policy opposed by Christians and others. In Muslim areas, a person may be flogged as punishment for immorality, regardless of their religion. This situation has contributed in part to violence and conflict in the nation.

General Attitudes

Individual Nigerians tend to identify first with their ethnicity, next their religion, and then their nationality. This helps explain the difficulty in uniting the country and in resolving disputes. People take great pride in their heritage. Educated Nigerians avoid using the word "tribe," preferring "ethnic group"; however, the average person is not insulted by the word "tribe" when discussing ethnicity. Tensions exist between various groups due to their traditional spheres of influence, as well as past conflicts. For instance, the Ibo control some oil areas and have bitter feelings about the Biafra War; in 2000, some Ibo revived a call for independence. Yoruba tend to control the press and financial sector; they often led pro-democracy movements in the 1990s. The Hausa have generally held political and military control since independence. Former president Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, had his support base among the Hausa because of his past military ties.

Northerners tend to be quiet, reserved, and conservative in

dealing with others. To them, raising the voice indicates anger. Southerners are more likely to be open and outgoing. They enjoy public debate and arguing. They may often shout to make a point or attract attention; shouting does not necessarily indicate anger. Daily life in Nigeria moves at a relaxed pace. Schedules are not as important as the needs of an individual.

Personal Appearance

Dress varies according to the area and culture, but dressing well is important for all Nigerians. Most people prefer traditional African fashions to Western clothing, although T-shirts and pants are worn in urban areas. Attire is more casual and more Western among the Ibo. Northern Muslims dress conservatively, while southern Muslims tend to wear more informal and Western attire.

Traditional men's clothing is loose and comfortable. Shirts typically extend to the knees. Women and young girls usually wear a long wraparound skirt (usually handmade with locally produced fabrics), a short-sleeved top, and a headscarf. More conservative Muslim women wear a veil over their faces in public. Nigerian fabrics are known for their bright colors and unique patterns, and Nigerian fashions are also popular in other African countries.

Women often have their hair plaited into intricate designs, sometimes with artificial hair woven in. A variety of hair products are used to change the color and texture of a person's hair. Different hairstyles are given colorful names, such as Ghana weaving, *tai tai*, *up jail*, *watermelon*, and *pick and drop*.

For many, heaviness is an indication of beauty and wealth, so girls are encouraged to gain weight in order to attract a husband. In some areas, girls may be sent to "fattening rooms" to prepare them for womanhood and marriage.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

In Nigeria, greetings are highly valued among the different ethnic groups. People are courteous and cheerful when exchanging greetings. Neglecting to greet another person or rushing through a greeting is a sign of disrespect. Because of the diversity of customs, cultures, and dialects in Nigeria, English greetings are widely used throughout the country. Nigerians use *Hello*, but *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, and *Good evening* are more common. After the initial greeting, people usually inquire about each other's well-being, work, or family. The appropriate response is usually *Fine*, but one listens to this response before proceeding with the conversation. If a person is wearing a hat, he or she usually removes it as sign of respect when greeting elders. People may also shake hands or hug when greeting. Personal space between members of the same sex is limited, and Nigerians may stand or sit very close when conversing.

Gestures

Because Nigeria is a multicultural nation, gestures differ from one ethnic group to another. Most people point with the index

finger. People beckon by waving all fingers together with the palm facing down. Pushing the palm of the hand forward with the fingers spread is considered vulgar. Hausa do not point the sole of the foot or shoe at another person. Most people pass objects with the right hand or both hands but usually not the left hand alone. Yoruba often wink at their children if they want them to leave the room when guests are visiting.

Visiting

Visiting plays an important part in maintaining family and friendship ties. Nigerians visit their relatives frequently. Unannounced guests are welcome, as planning ahead is difficult in areas where telephones are not widely available. Hosts endeavor to make guests feel comfortable and usually offer them some refreshments. Invited guests are not expected to bring gifts, but small gifts are appreciated. For social engagements or other planned activities, a starting time may be indicated, but guests are not expected to be on time. Late guests are anticipated and they do not disrupt the event. Few homes have sufficient space for hosting gatherings of more than a few people. On special occasions (such as holidays or social events), families often block off the road in front of their home to make room for guests to congregate.

Eating

Eating habits depend on a person's ethnic group and social status. Most people wash their hands before eating. Some Nigerians eat using the fingers of the right hand, while others use utensils. Certain foods, such as rice, are nearly always eaten with utensils. The group generally eats from a central, shared plate. Families may eat at a table or around a mat placed on the floor. If diners are sitting at a table, hands generally are kept above the table. Invited guests are expected to try any food that is offered. Most Nigerians say a blessing on their food.

Lunch is typically the main meal on weekends, when families are home together. On weekdays, people generally eat lunch away from home, so dinner is the main meal. Families try to eat at least the main meal together, although in some conservative families men eat separately from women and children.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

Nigerians view family as a source of strength and comfort. Traditionally, extended family networks were very important, and members of the extended family provided assistance to other members in need. In the past, married couples lived with the husband's family, and raising children was seen as the responsibility of the entire family, with relatives assisting with childcare and discipline. In many families, particularly among lower-income families and in rural and suburban areas, this network of support remains in place, and extended families often share a home or live in the same compound.

However, in much of the country, family relations are in a state of transition. In urban areas and among the wealthy,

people more often live as nuclear families. Emphasis is shifting from the extended family to the nuclear family, and fewer people now seek or provide help within the extended family. In recent years, migration to urban areas has also weakened traditional family ties, as families become more spread out and young people grow up away from their extended families.

Family size varies according to region and family situation. An urban couple often has four or five children, while a rural family may have as many as ten or twelve. A polygamous household may contain twenty or more children.

Parents and Children

In most families, children live with their parents until marriage or until they reach their late twenties or early thirties; it is increasingly rare for children to live with their families after marriage. Children are taught to be unassertive, quiet, and respectful in their interactions with adults. They help with chores from a young age, often doing tasks like washing dishes, shopping, fetching water, and ironing clothes. Children may also help on the family farm or work to support the family, often by trading in the market. Child trafficking and forced labor are common in Nigeria, particularly among orphans and children from poor families.

Nigerians have deep respect for their elders. Grown children usually support their aging parents financially, often sending them money on a monthly basis. Women usually help their parents and in-laws maintain the household, while men often help with errands.

Gender Roles

In general, Nigerian families are male dominated. Men make most major decisions related to the family. When a husband dies, leadership of the family generally passes to the oldest son rather than the wife. Men are responsible for supporting the family financially, though other family members may also contribute. Women are traditionally responsible for the household and children. Women who work outside the home maintain these responsibilities, regardless of the other demands on their time. A growing number of men help with household chores and childcare. Middle-class and wealthy families may hire household help, in which case the woman is responsible for supervising the employees.

Muslim women are often sheltered. Most non-Muslim women enjoy relatively more freedom, both in influencing family decisions and openly trading at the marketplace. Many families are headed by women who give birth outside of wedlock, are divorced, or are widowed. The role of women outside the home has expanded in recent years. About 48 percent of women work outside the home, often working as tailors, nurses, caterers, restaurant workers, housekeepers, receptionists, and owners of small shops. Women are active in politics but hold relatively few seats in Parliament.

Despite these gains, women still face significant discrimination in society. While the 1999 constitution granted women equal rights, traditional and religious customs often favor men. Many families do not send their girls to school because of a belief that learning to be good mothers and wives is more important than formal education. Women without civil marriages are not entitled to inheritance upon the death of their husbands and are often left without income

or savings. Married women must have their husbands' consent in order to leave the country or obtain a passport. Women cannot purchase property and may find it difficult to obtain bank loans. Domestic violence is common and legal as long as it does not result in serious injury. Female circumcision is widely practiced, though less frequently among the younger generation.

Housing

Urban

Urban areas struggle to absorb the large numbers of migrants coming from rural areas in search of better economic opportunities, which makes housing expensive and difficult to find. Urban homes often consist of cement blocks covered with a layer of cement. Wood and metal sheeting are the most common roofing materials.

Most urban homes and a growing number of rural homes have access to electricity, though outages are frequent. Urban homes usually have running water. Wealthy and middle-class Nigerians paint their homes. Furniture is locally made, usually from wood. Wealthy families may furnish and decorate their homes in a style similar to Western homes. Outside their homes, families may plant lawns, trees, flowers, vegetable gardens, and medicinal plants.

Many urban residents live in apartment buildings, and lower-income families may rent a single room in a freestanding house, in which they share the kitchen and bathroom with other families. Low-income homes are simply furnished and largely undecorated. Poor urban residents may also occupy crowded urban slums without electricity or running water.

Rural

In rural and suburban areas, extended families often live together in a family compound made up of a group of houses built near one another on a single portion of land. The compound is usually surrounded by a fence. The houses are usually located around a central courtyard, where families do the cooking, hold family events, dry laundry, and park vehicles.

Rural houses are generally made of mud bricks that have been made by hand and dried in the sun. Sometimes a layer of cement is added. Roofs are built using palm leaves or tree branches. Pit latrines are typical in rural areas and poor urban areas. Families without indoor plumbing get their water from streams, boreholes (narrow holes dug to reach underground water), communal water pumps, or commercial water distributors.

Home Ownership

Most people in urban areas rent their homes. The cost of buying land and construction materials and applying for the required building permits is usually high in comparison to the average income. Mortgages are extremely difficult to obtain. In rural and suburban areas, land is distributed by community elders and chiefs. Families generally are not given the title to the land they live on, which limits their ability to sell the land and take advantage of natural resources. If a person is given the title, they are required to obtain the permission of the community leaders before selling the land.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

Most young people choose their spouses. Dating begins in the mid- to late teens. Western-style dating is uncommon in rural areas but is increasingly common among urban youth. Parents generally disapprove of casual dating, so young people often date without their knowledge, only introducing their partners to their parents after making plans to marry. The growing use of cell phones and social networking websites has made it easier for young people to meet and socialize without parental knowledge. Many young people begin dating when they start university in a city, as dating may not be acceptable in their home village. Couples may meet at church, at school, at cultural events, or in the community. Common dating activities include picnics, concerts, and cultural events. Couples may also spend time at each other's homes, eat at restaurants, go on walks, and attend nightclubs.

Some parents arrange marriages for their children. Among certain ethnic groups, such as the Ibo, young people are free to date, but once they are considered adults with the means to marry, their parents arrange a marriage for them. Muslim youth are closely supervised when spending time with members of the opposite sex, and any physical contact before marriage is forbidden.

Engagement

When a couple is ready to marry, the man proposes to the woman. If she accepts, he makes arrangements to visit her parents. He is accompanied by his parents or uncles, one of whom is chosen to speak on his behalf as a show of respect to the bride's family. While this person does most of the talking, at a certain point in the meeting, the prospective groom is asked to confirm that the request is being made on his behalf. Among some ethnic groups, the groom's family sends the request in a letter, which the bride's family initially ignores but eventually answers. If the two families agree to the marriage, a date is set to arrange the dowry.

Marriage in Society

The payment of a bride-price is common throughout the country and is usually part of the wedding ceremony. The groom is expected to give money, property (such as kola nuts, food, drinks, and clothing), or service to the family of the bride as compensation for the loss of their daughter. In some ethnic groups, the contents of the bride-price are standard and have not changed for several generations, while in other groups, the couple's families negotiate what the bride-price will include. In some groups, the bride-price is relatively affordable for the average person; in others, it can take years to save up. When the bride-price is high, a couple may choose to live together instead of marrying, though this arrangement is not well accepted in society. Couples who wish to marry but cannot afford the bride-price may live together, have children, and carry out the marriage rituals in several installments, sometimes over many years. Some northern governments provide subsidies to help such couples marry and avoid violating *shari'ah* (Islamic law).

Marriage is greatly valued in Nigerian society, and most people hope to marry in a public ceremony, though economic challenges make this difficult for many. Men often marry in their mid-twenties. Women usually marry by age 20, though

in some northern states they can marry in their early teens. Many men delay marriage until they are financially stable, often in their thirties. The marriage age is generally younger in rural areas than in cities.

Weddings

Weddings may be traditional, religious, or civil. Customs vary greatly according to ethnic group. Traditional marriages are the most common, followed by religious ceremonies. Traditional marriages are celebrated with refreshments and music and dances by local bands and dance troupes, usually in a style related to the bride's ethnic group. Among the Efik, the wedding includes a coming-of-age ceremony at which the parents of the bride publicly present her with gifts for her future home. Among some groups in the north, the groom may be flogged to show that he is strong enough to protect the bride. Traditional marriages in the south are held at the bride's family home; the family of the bride has the responsibility to host and entertain the groom and his guests.

Christian weddings vary by denomination. Ceremonies usually take place in a church and are conducted by a priest, who pronounces the couple husband and wife after they exchange rings and vows. The groom wears a suit or tuxedo, and the bride wears a white Western-style wedding gown. A reception is usually held at the church, a rented event center, or the home of one set of the couple's parents.

Muslim marriage ceremonies take place at the bride's home but involve only men; the bride does not attend. The men from the two families finalize and exchange the bride-price. When the wedding is complete, the men cheer to announce the marriage to the women. A celebration is then held, with food, drinks, music, and dancing. However, the wedding is not complete until the following day, when the bride is escorted to her husband's house. On this day, the couple may host a celebration for friends and family. Men and women celebrate in separate areas, listening to music, having refreshments, and giving speeches in honor of the bride and groom.

In most of the country, a marriage must contain a civil ceremony performed by a marriage registrar in order to be legal. Many couples see little value in a legal marriage, but a growing number of younger couples include a civil ceremony. In northern Nigeria, under *shari'ah* law, Muslim marriages are not required to include a civil ceremony in order to be considered legal. Polygamous marriages cannot be registered civilly, although they are acceptable according to custom and religion.

Polygamy

By Islamic law, a Muslim man can have as many as four wives as long as he has the consent of his wives and provided he can support each wife equally. Many non-Muslim men also practice polygamy, and about 30 percent of all women are in polygamous marriages. In polygamous households, each wife may have her own building in a compound or room in a home.

Divorce

Divorce is rare but not unheard of. Because marriage is considered a lifetime commitment, divorce is frowned upon. Since most marriages are not registered with the government, a couple may be considered divorced if they simply stop

living together. In some groups, a woman has the right to return to her family home if she is unhappy in a marriage. In other groups, a woman loses the right to live in her parents' home when she marries, making divorce difficult. There is considerable stigma attached to divorce, and divorced women find it harder to remarry than divorced men.

Life Cycle

Birth

Ceremonies that mark life transitions differ widely by region, ethnic group, and religion. For several weeks following the birth of a child, the mother usually stays at home with the baby and is cared for by family members. A traditional naming ceremony is held, especially in rural areas, and a large feast follows. Ibo families may wait three months to formally name a child. Yoruba and Hausa families typically hold a naming ceremony seven days after the birth. A Yoruba child may be given several names, as the father and both sets of grandparents are each asked to select one. At the celebration that accompanies the ceremony, family and friends enjoy smoked fish, pounded yams, palm wine, and kola nuts (which are chewed to produce a mild caffeine stimulant). A Hausa naming ceremony takes place early in the morning and is attended only by close family members.

Christian families hold a church service three months after a baby is born to dedicate the child to God and give thanks for the birth. This service is generally the first time the mother attends church after giving birth. Afterward, a reception is held at the family home, where guests are entertained with food and music.

Milestones

At 18, young people receive some legal rights associated with adulthood, like the right to vote and hold a national identity card. However, most people consider 21 to be the age a person reaches adulthood. At this age, they no longer need their parents' consent for major life decisions, such as marriage. Family and friends celebrate the 21st birthday with festive parties and picnics. Today, traditional coming-of-age ceremonies involving circumcision and other rites are uncommon, particularly in urban areas.

An important life event for many is receiving a title as part of a formal ceremony. Titles may be associated with ethnic group, religion, political office, profession, or a secret society. For example, a successful yam farmer may be given a yam title by a community leader, or a secret society may bestow a title on an important member. Those who have such titles are highly regarded in society, and titles are carefully used in order to convey respect.

Very few people celebrate their birthdays every year. Those who can afford it may hold birthday parties when they reach significant or round ages (perhaps every five or ten years), inviting friends and family members to celebrate with them. Regardless of whether a party is held, Nigerians make it a point to wish one another happy birthday.

Many people join *age grades* (associations made up of members of the same general age, usually within two to three years of each other) starting around age 10. In order to join, a person must be sponsored by an existing member of the group. *Age grades* hold activities geared toward increasing

solidarity within the community. In rural areas, *age grades* are especially important in the social lives of their members. Secret societies are active in most communities and may be associated with a religion or ethnic group. Secret societies play a large role in the lives of their members and many charge high membership dues. Members of secret societies may support one another financially in time of need, advise one another, and host social events. Some secret societies have cultural troupes that perform at public festivals. The age at which members join a secret society varies. Some may be joined at any age; in others, membership passes from parent to child.

Death

When a Muslim person dies, the body is buried as soon as possible. The body is wrapped in a white sheet and taken to the cemetery on a wooden platform similar to a stretcher. Memorial rites, prayers, and feasts are held over the weeks that follow. Christians dress the dead in the best clothing available. A wake is then held, at which relatives and friends come to pay their respects. In the south, a body may be embalmed to preserve it for a festive burial ceremony, which can take place more than a month after the death. At the cemetery, members of the deceased's family help fill in the grave with dirt.

If the deceased lived a long life, the family hosts a festive reception after the burial, with feasting and music. If the deceased was young, a small celebration or no celebration at all follows the burial. The Ibo, in particular, hold celebrations after a burial. They generally celebrate death more festively than birth, because after death, it is believed that the person's soul goes on to a state of eternal rest.

A widow is expected to wear all black for two or three months after the death of her husband and may shave her head. Among some groups, she may be expected to marry her husband's brother. Widowers are not generally expected to mourn as visibly.

Diet

The mainstays of the Nigerian diet are yams, cassava (a starchy root), plantains, and rice. Yoruba are fond of hot, spicy food. Their meals normally are accompanied by a pepper sauce made with fish, meat, or chicken. Nigeria's warm climate provides for a wide selection of fruits and vegetables to supplement the diet.

Dairy cattle are scarce in coastal regions, where the tsetse fly threatens livestock. Canned margarine, cheese, and powdered milk are used as dairy-product substitutes, though imported dairy products are also available. The Fulani, who traditionally live inland, are known for their dairy products, particularly yogurt mixed with millet and sugar.

Recreation

Sports

Soccer is the most popular sport in Nigeria. Boys, men, and sometimes girls play informal matches in whatever space is available. In urban areas, people enjoy watching international soccer matches on television. Matches of national teams and local soccer clubs are also well attended. Nigerians are extremely proud of their national soccer teams, which have

been successful in international competitions and won the gold medal at the 1996 Olympic Games. Wrestling is also popular. The wealthy enjoy polo, cricket, lawn bowling, golf, and swimming.

Leisure

Few Nigerians have access to working movie theaters, but most people enjoy watching DVDs and television. Locally produced films are popular, as are those from the United States. Live theater and art exhibits are well attended by the educated elite. Nigerians also enjoy traditional music and dance, which is usually associated with celebrations and special occasions.

In many areas, visiting is the primary leisure activity. People spend time socializing with family and friends in the home. Men usually have more free time than women and often spend time in bars and cafés, talking or drinking with one another. Women, particularly in rural areas, have little time for recreation, but they socialize while doing chores or fixing one another's hair.

Draughts (a game similar to chess) is often played in public places. Game pieces are usually fashioned out of bottle caps. A crowd sometimes gathers to watch, with a spectator replacing the loser of each game. Young girls enjoy playing *okpoko* (a two-person game in which the players clap, sing, and dance to a rhythm). When the game begins, the players each extend one leg simultaneously. The players take turns as the leader, and the other tries to guess and match which leg the leader will extend. Points are scored according to whether the players extend the same leg.

Storytelling is a common leisure activity for women and children, particularly in rural areas. Many mothers tell their children folk tales or fables that contain moral lessons. Teenagers enjoy playing video games, using the internet (especially social networking sites), and socializing in cafés. People of all ages enjoy eating at outdoor restaurants and fast-food restaurants. Many people volunteer with religious, cultural, or aid organizations in their free time.

Vacation

Most Nigerians cannot afford to take extended vacations. People may take short day trips to nearby destinations. Those who live near the coast often visit the beach. Families may also travel to visit relatives. Those who can afford it may visit destinations within Nigeria, such as the Obudu Mountains, Abuja, and Lagos. The wealthy may visit other African countries or destinations abroad, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, or the United Arab Emirates.

The Arts

Nigerian music often combines Western and traditional elements and is typically accompanied by dancing. Among the greats of Nigerian music is Fela Kuti, who pioneered *Afrobeat* (a blend of jazz, funk, and local rhythms) in the 1960s and '70s. Another Nigerian style, *juju*, is derived from Ghanaian *highlife*. Nigerian *juju* incorporates guitars with the *dundun*, known as the "talking drum" because its tones can be understood as words. Musicians such as King Sunny Adé and Ebenezer Obey helped popularize *juju* in the 1970s and '80s. Fuji music, developed by Alhaji Sikiru Ayinde Barrister, has no guitars but uses several drums. Its origins are in the

Islamic call to prayer during *Ramadan*.

Nigeria's painters and sculptors use modern techniques while drawing from indigenous themes. Among Nigeria's many folk arts are soapstone and wooden statuettes. Wooden masks are used in traditional religious ceremonies.

Nigeria has a rich oral tradition. Storytelling serves as both a form of entertainment and a means of transmitting cultural knowledge and values. A number of Nigerian writers have received international recognition. Three of the most prominent are Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, and Wole Soyinka. Achebe is best known for his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. Nwapa became the first African woman to publish a novel in English in 1966. In 1986, Soyinka became the first African to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Nigeria hosts Africa's most prolific film industry, called Nollywood, which rivals the U.S. film industry in terms of number of films produced annually. Nigerian films are popular throughout the continent, again rivaling American films in popularity in some areas. Many are informally made with relatively small budgets. Because movie theaters are rare, Nollywood films are generally released only on DVD.

Holidays

National holidays include New Year's Day, Workers' Day (1 May), Democracy Day (29 May), and National Day (1 Oct.). Additional national holidays that are celebrated by much of the country include the Muslim holidays *Eid al-Fitr*, *Eid al-Kabir* (also called Sallah Day and *Eid al-Adha*), and *Maulid an-Nabi* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Christian holidays Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Muslim Holidays

Muslim holidays are determined according to the lunar calendar, which is shorter than the Western (Gregorian) year by about 11 days. Since dates are set according to the moon's phases, the Gregorian dates for holidays differ from year to year. These holidays include *Maulid an-Nabi* (the prophet Muhammad's birthday), *Eid al-Fitr* (a three-day feast at the end of the month of Ramadan), and *Eid al-Kabir* (the Feast of the Sacrifice). During *Ramadan*, those who are able fast from sunup to sundown. Families eat together in the evenings and visit friends. At *Eid al-Kabir*, families slaughter a sheep as a symbol of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. The holiday is celebrated by feasting, exchanging gifts, offering gifts to the poor, and attending religious services.

Christian Holidays

Christmas and Easter are the most important Christian holidays. Christians may invite non-Christian friends to share the main holiday meals. Churches hold special services, and those who can afford it give gifts to the poor. Christmas is especially important, and preparations begin at least a month in advance. Friends and family exchange gifts. Boxing Day (26 Dec.) is a day for visiting and comes from a British tradition of giving small boxed gifts to service workers the day after Christmas.

Other Holidays

The most important patriotic holiday is Independence Day, which celebrates Nigeria's 1960 declaration of independence from Britain. On this day, members of the military and

schoolchildren march in patriotic parades. A growing number of people celebrate Valentine's Day, as a result of Western influences. Couples may exchange gifts and go on dates to celebrate. People may also visit the sick or poor on this day.

Festivals

A variety of festivals are celebrated by different ethnic groups and in different areas of the country. The Argungu Fishing Festival is celebrated in the state of Kebbi. The festival lasts four days and culminates in a one-hour fishing tournament in which thousands of men compete to catch the largest fish. The 12-day Osun-Osogbo Festival is held each year in a sacred area of virgin forest and honors traditional gods. In some areas, New Yam festivals celebrate the yam harvest. People give thanks to traditional deities for a successful growing season, and within these areas, no yams may be eaten or sold until after the festival is held. Celebrations include singing, dancing, preparing special foods, and honoring successful farmers.

SOCIETY

Government

Head of State: Pres. Goodluck Jonathan

Head of Government: Pres. Goodluck Jonathan

Capital: Abuja

Structure

The president is head of state and head of government and is elected by popular vote for a four-year term, with a two-term limit. The legislative branch is called the National Assembly and consists of a 109-seat Senate (three seats for each state and one for the capital) and a 360-seat House of Representatives. Members of both chambers are elected by popular vote to four-year terms. The Supreme Court has one chief justice and fifteen other justices. The president appoints judges from recommendations by the National Judicial Counsel, and judges serve until they are 65. Nigeria is composed of 36 states and one territory, each with elected governors and legislatures. Each state drafts its own legislation and exercises a significant amount of autonomy from the central government. At the local level, elected council chairmen represent the state and federal governments.

Political Landscape

The socially conservative People's Democratic Party (PDP) has remained the dominant political party since the 1999 return to civilian rule, though many argue this continuous power has been maintained unfairly. Many parties in Nigeria are regionally based, though the PDP is reputed to represent the interests of the elite. Most of the elites in Nigeria get their wealth from oil production, much of which happens in the Niger Delta region. Unequal distribution of oil revenues is a major source of conflict in Nigeria, and much of the conflict in the Delta region itself turns violent.

As part of the constitution adopted in 1999, the predominantly Muslim states have the option of establishing *shari'ah* (Islamic law) courts to handle certain cases. The states have interpreted that to mean *shari'ah* can be the governing force in most local matters, a policy opposed by

Christians and others. The 2011 election of Goodluck Jonathan, a southern Christian, deepened the political division between the predominately Muslim north and the Christian south. Conflicts between Christian and Muslim groups are often violent. In northern Nigeria, hundreds were killed in rioting that broke out after Jonathan's election, and over a thousand deaths from bombings and other attacks, which often target Christian churches, have since been attributed to the Islamist group Boko Haram, whose name loosely translates to "Western education is sinful."

Government and the People

Many freedoms are officially preserved by the constitution, though often not respected in practice. Many people face religious and political discrimination and persecution, both from government and non-government groups, including political parties. Demonstrations in the Niger Delta region especially are suppressed quickly. Corruption is also widely reported. Recently, though, there has been progress toward more transparent elections and a more diverse selection of candidates for office. The voting age is 18. Voter turnout has been rather low in recent elections, and vote rigging and voter intimidation commonly disrupt elections. Corruption remains a pervasive problem in government.

Economy

GDP (PPP) in billions: \$450.5

GDP (PPP) per capita: \$2,700

Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers, but only a minority of the population actually benefits from oil revenue. Many Nigerians have no income or do not earn enough to meet their needs. Unemployment and inflation are high. Agriculture employs about 70 percent of the population. Nigeria is a major producer of peanuts. Other key crops include cotton, cocoa, yams, cassava, sorghum, corn, and rice. Rubber and cocoa are important exports. Petroleum accounts for 95 percent of all export earnings. In addition to oil-related and agriculture-processing industries, Nigeria has textile, cement, steel, chemical, and other industries. The currency is the *naira* (NGN).

Nigeria's economy is one of the largest in Africa and has great potential for high productivity, diversity, and vitality. Unfortunately, it has been battered by political turmoil, fluctuations in world oil prices, corruption, and poor central planning. Recent reforms by the government to diversify the economy and reduce debt have created strong economic growth, but wealth distribution remains highly unequal, with 70 percent of the population living in extreme poverty.

Transportation and Communications

Internet Users (per 100 people): 28

Cellular Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people): 59

Paved Roads: 15%

Nigerian cities are linked by roads, railroads, and air routes. People travel by bus in and between cities. Also common is the "bush-taxi," a crowded minibus that travels on a set route without a schedule. A small fraction of all roads in the country are paved.

There are several radio and television stations, both government- and private-owned. While the press is formally free, media outlets face opposition from both government and non-government groups. More than half of Nigerians own cell phones, which far outnumber landlines in the country. Roughly a third of Nigerians are estimated to use the internet. While cell phones are found throughout the country, internet access does not yet reach most rural areas. Rural Nigerians rely on word-of-mouth and radio for information.

Education

Adult Literacy: 61.3%

Mean Years of Schooling: 5.2

Structure

Primary school begins at age six and lasts six years. In many northern states, before entering primary school Muslim children attend *Qur'anic* schools, where they study Islam in addition to secular subjects. Although primary school is technically compulsory, only about 60 percent of boys and 55 percent of girls are enrolled. Secondary school lasts six years and is divided into two levels: junior secondary school (which is compulsory) and senior secondary school (which is optional), each lasting three years. Most students do not enroll in secondary school. The majority of students attend public schools, but private schools are growing in popularity, particularly at the university level.

Access

Although primary school and junior secondary school are free, students must provide their own textbooks, supplies, and uniforms. They may also be required to pay fees to cover the costs associated with maintaining the school building. After junior secondary school, students must pay tuition in order to continue their studies. For many families, the costs associated with their children's education are difficult to cover. Families often make great sacrifices in order to send their children to school. Children themselves often work in the evenings to help pay their school fees.

School Life

School instruction is in English, which few children speak before entering school. In the early years of education, much time is devoted to learning a new language, often at the cost of mastering other skills. In response, some primary schools now use the area's dominant native tongue, allowing students to attain basic skills first and learn English later. Primary education covers general subjects. In secondary school, students choose a number of areas to study. Schools emphasize applied science and technology, with a goal to introduce more Nigerians into the skilled workforce.

In order to advance to each year of schooling, students must pass both written and oral exams. Students who do not pass repeat the previous year of schooling and then take the exam again. Sharing answers is widespread and generally accepted as a normal part of students' efforts to finish their education. Government efforts are underway to discourage this attitude and are meeting with some success. Teaching styles are often authoritative and focus on memorization, with little opportunity for discussion and analysis. Class sizes are large. Few schools use technology in the classroom. In states

with *shari'ah* (Islamic law), boys and girls attend separate schools.

Higher Education

In order to be accepted to a university, a student must attain at least a *four credit* (a score on the final senior secondary school examination, indicating that the student passed exams in four subjects). Most states have public universities. A growing number of private and religious universities are also available. It is not uncommon for students to attend a university in a different part of the country than where they were raised. Many Nigerians attend universities abroad, in part because there is a shortage of space in Nigerian universities to accommodate all those who wish to attend. Those who do not attend university may enter the workforce, start their own small business, attend vocational training, or begin an informal apprenticeship in trades like tailoring, carpentry, auto mechanics, or radio repair.

Health

Much of the population lacks access to health care, and public hospitals are understaffed and poorly supplied. There is less than one physician for every one thousand people in Nigeria. The best care is available at medical colleges. Private clinics are too expensive for most people. Facilities and care are inadequate in rural areas, and infant mortality and maternal mortality rates are high. Only 39 percent of births are attended by skilled health personnel, and nearly 14 percent of all children die before they reach age five. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in Africa. Tropical diseases and AIDS rank among the nation's major health challenges. Nigeria is one of the few countries in the world where polio is still a problem.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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Country and Development Data

Capital	Abuja
Population	174,507,539 (rank=7)
Area (sq. mi.)	356,669 (rank=33)
Area (sq. km.)	923,768
Human Development Index	153 of 187 countries
Gender Inequality Index	NA
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$2,700
Adult Literacy	72% (male); 50% (female)
Infant Mortality	72.97 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	51 (male); 53 (female)
Currency	Naira

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